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HONOUR AND DISHONOUR

A SPEECH

BY

THE RIGHT HON.

D. LLOYD GEORGE, M.P.

CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER

AT THE QUEEN'S HALL
LONDON

SEPT. 19 1914

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HONOUR AND DISHONOUR

A Speech by the Rt. Hon. D. Lloyd George, at Queen's Hall, London

I HAVE come here this afternoon to talk to my fellow countrymen about this great war and the part we ought to take in it. I feel my task is easier after we have been listening to the greatest battle song in the world.*

There is no man in this room who has always regarded the prospects of engaging in a great war with greater reluctance, with greater repugnance, than I have done throughout the whole of my political life. There is no man, either inside or outside of this room, more convinced that we could not have avoided it without national dishonour. I am fully alive to the fact that whenever a nation has been engaged in any war she has always invoked the sacred name of honour. Many a crime has been committed in its name; there are some crimes being committed now. But, all the same, national honour is a reality, and any nation that disregards it is doomed.

Why is our honour as a country involved in this war? Because, in the first place, we are bound in an honourable obligation to defend the independence, the liberty, the integrity of a small neighbour that has lived peaceably, but she could not have compelled us, because she was weak. The man who declines to discharge his debt because his creditor is too poor to enforce it is a blackguard. We entered into this treaty, a solemn treaty, a full treaty, to defend Belgium and her integrity. Our signatures are attached to the document. Our signatures do not stand alone there. This was not the only country to defend the integrity of Belgium, Russia, France, Austria, and Prussia—they are all there. Why did they not perform the obligation? It is suggested that if we quote this treaty it is purely an excuse on our part. It is our low craft and cunning, just to cloak our jealousy of a superior civilisation we are attempting to destroy. Our answer is the action we took in 1870. What was that? Mr. Gladstone was then Prime Minister. Lord Granville, I think, was then

* "The Men of Harlech."

Foreign Secretary. I have never heard it laid to their charge that they were ever jingo.

What did they do in 1870? That Treaty Bond was this: we called upon the belligerent Powers to respect that treaty. We called upon France; we called upon Germany. At that time, bear in mind, the greatest danger to Belgium came from France and not from Germany. We intervened to protect Belgium against France exactly as we are doing now to protect her against Germany. We are proceeding exactly in the same way. We invited both the belligerent Powers to state that they had no intention of violating Belgian territory. What was the answer given by Bismarck? He said it was superfluous to ask Prussia such a question in view of the treaties in force. France gave a similar answer. We received the thanks at that time from the Belgian people for our intervention in a very remarkable document. This is the document addressed by the municipality of Brussels to Queen Victoria after that intervention:

"The great and noble people over whose destinies you preside have just given a further proof of its benevolent sentiments towards this country. The voice of the English nation has been heard above the din of arms. It has asserted the principles of justice and right. Next to the unalterable attachment of the Belgian people to their independence, the strongest sentiment which fills their hearts is that of an imperishable gratitude to the people of Great Britain."

That was in 1870. Mark what follows.

Three or four days after that document of thanks the French Army was wedged up against the Belgian frontier. Every means of escape was shut up by a ring of flame from Prussian cannon. There was one way of escape. What was that? By violating the neutrality of Belgium. What did they do? The French on that occasion preferred ruin, humiliation, to the breaking of their bond. The French Emperor, French Marshals, 100,000 gallant Frenchmen in arms preferred to be carried captive to the strange land of their enemy rather than dishonour the name of their country. It was the last French Army defeat. Had they violated Belgian neutrality the whole history of that war would have been changed. And yet it was the interest of France to break the treaty. She did not do it.

It is now the interest of Prussia to break the treaty, and she has done it. Well, why? She avowed it with cynical contempt for every principle of justice. She says treaties only bind you when it is to your interest to keep them. "What is a treaty?" says the German Chancellor. "A scrap of paper." Have you any £5 notes about you? I am not calling for them. Have you any of those neat little Treasury £1 notes? If you have, burn them; they are only "scraps of paper." What are they made of? Rags. What are they worth? The whole credit

of the British Empire. "Scraps of paper." I have been dealing with scraps of paper within the last month. It is suddenly found the commerce of the world is coming to a standstill. The machine had stopped. Why? I will tell you. We discovered, many of us for the first time—I do not pretend to say that I do not know much more about the machinery of commerce to-day than I did six weeks ago, and there are a good many men like me—we discovered the machinery of commerce was moved by bills of exchange. I have seen some of them—wretched, crinkled, scrawled over, blotched, frowsy, and yet these wretched little scraps of paper moved great ships, laden with thousands of tons of precious cargo, from one end of the world to the other. What was the motive power behind them? The honour of commercial men.

Treaties are the currency of international statesmanship. Let us be fair. German merchants, German traders had the reputation of being as upright and straightforward as any traders in the world. But if the currency of German commerce is to be debased to the level of her statesmanship, no trader from Shanghai to Valparaiso will ever look at a German signature again. This doctrine of the scrap of paper, this doctrine which is superscribed by Bernhardt as treaties which serve only as long as it is to its interest, goes to the root of public law. It is the straight road to barbarism, just as if you removed the magnetic pole whenever it was in the way of a German cruiser, the whole navigation of the seas would become dangerous, difficult, impossible, and the whole machinery of civilisation will break down if this doctrine wins in this war.

We are fighting against barbarism. But there is only one way of putting it right. If there are nations that say they will only respect treaties when it is to their interest to do so, we must make it to their interest to do so for the future. What is their defence? Just look at the interview which took place between our Ambassador and great German officials when their attention was called to this treaty to which they were partners. They said: "We cannot help that." Rapidity of action was the great German asset. There is a greater asset for a nation than rapidity of action, and that is—honest dealing.

What are her excuses? She said Belgium was plotting against her, that Belgium was engaged in a great conspiracy with Britain and with France to attack her. Not merely is that not true, but Germany knows it is not true. What is her other excuse? France meant to invade Germany through Belgium. Absolutely untrue. France offered Belgium five army corps to defend her if she was attacked. Belgium said: "I don't require them. I have got the word of the Kaiser. Shall Cæsar send a lie?" All these tales about conspiracy have been fanned up since. The great nation ought to be ashamed, ought to be ashamed to behave

like a fraudulent bankrupt perjuring its way with its complications. She has deliberately broken this treaty, and we were in honour bound to stand by it.

Belgium has been treated brutally, how brutally we shall not yet know. We know already too much. What has she done? Did she send an ultimatum to Germany? Did she challenge Germany? Was she preparing to make war on Germany? Had she ever inflicted any wrongs upon Germany which the Kaiser was bound to redress? She was one of the most unoffending little countries in Europe. She was peaceable, industrious, thrifty, hard-working, giving offence to no one; and her cornfields have been trampled down, her villages have been burned to the ground, her art treasures have been destroyed, her men have been slaughtered, yea, and her women and children, too. What had she done? Hundreds of thousands of her people have had their quiet, comfortable little homes burned to the dust, and are wandering homeless in their own land. What is their crime? Their crime was that they trusted to the word of a Prussian King. I don't know what the Kaiser hopes to achieve by this war. I have a shrewd idea of what he will get, but one thing is made certain, that no nation in future will ever commit that crime again.

I am not going to enter into these tales. Many of them are untrue; war is a grim, ghastly business at best, and I am not going to say that all that has been said in the way of tales of outrage is true. I will go beyond that and say that if you turn two millions of men forced, conscripted, and compelled and driven into the field, you will certainly get among them a certain number of men who will do things that the nation itself will be ashamed of. I am not depending on them. It is enough for me to have the story which the Germans themselves avow, admit, defend, proclaim. The burning and massacring, the shooting down of harmless people—why? Because, according to the Germans, they fired on German soldiers. What business had German soldiers there at all? Belgium was acting in pursuance of a most sacred right, the right to defend your own home.

But they were not in uniform when they shot. If a burglar broke into the Kaiser's Palace at Potsdam, destroyed his furniture, shot down his servants, ruined his art treasures, especially those he made himself, burned his precious manuscripts, do you think he would wait until he got into uniform before he shot him down? They were dealing with those who had broken into their households, but their perfidy has already failed. They entered Belgium to save time. The time has gone. They have not gained time, but they have lost their good name.

But Belgium was not the only little nation that has been attacked in this war, and I make no excuse for referring to the case of the other little nation—the case of Servia. The history

of Serbia is not unblotted. What history in the category of nations is unblotted? The first nation that is without sin, let her cast a stone at Serbia. A nation trained in a horrible school, but she won her freedom with her tenacious valour, and she has maintained it by the same courage. If any Servians were mixed up in the assassination of the Grand Duke they ought to be punished. Serbia admits that; the Servian Government had nothing to do with it. Not even Austria claimed that. The Servian Prime Minister is one of the most capable and honoured men in Europe. Serbia was willing to punish any one of her subjects who had been proved to have any complicity in that assassination. What more could you expect? What were the Austrian demands? Serbia sympathised with her fellow-countrymen in Bosnia. That was one of her crimes. She must do so no more. Her newspapers were saying nasty things about Austria. They must do so no longer. That is the Austrian spirit. You had it in Zabern. How dare you criticise a Customs official, and if you laugh it is a capital offence. The Colonel threatened to shoot them if they repeated it.

Servian newspapers must not criticise Austria. I wonder what would have happened had we taken the same line about German newspapers. Serbia said: "Very well, we will give orders to the newspapers that they must not criticise Austria in future, neither Austria, nor Hungary, nor anything that is theirs." Who can doubt the valour of Serbia, when she undertook to tackle her newspaper editors? She promised not to sympathise with Bosnia, promised to write no critical articles about Austria. She would have no public meetings at which anything unkind was said about Austria.

That was not enough. She must dismiss from her army officers whom Austria should subsequently name. But these officers had just emerged from a war where they were adding lustre to the Servian arms—gallant, brave, efficient. I wonder whether it was their guilt or their efficiency that prompted Austria's action. But, mark, the officers were not named. Serbia was to undertake in advance to dismiss them from the army; the names to be sent on subsequently. Can you name a country in the world that would have stood that?

Supposing Austria or Germany had issued an ultimatum of that kind to this country. "You must dismiss from your Army and from your Navy all those officers whom we shall subsequently name!" Well, I think I could name them now. Lord Kitchener would go; Sir John French would be sent about his business; General Smith-Dorrien would be no more; and I am sure that Sir John Jellicoe would go. And there was another gallant old warrior that would go—Lord Roberts.

It was a difficult situation. Here was a demand made upon her by a great military Power who could put five or six men in

the field for every one she could; and that Power supported by the greatest military Power in the world. How did Serbia behave? It is not what happens to you in life that matters; it is the way in which you face it. And Serbia faced the situation with dignity. She said to Austria, "If any officers of mine have been guilty and are proved to be guilty, I will dismiss them." Austria said, "That is not good enough for me." It was not guilt she was after, but capacity.

Then came Russia's turn. Russia has a special regard for Serbia. She has a special interest in Serbia. Russians have shed their blood for Servian independence many a time. Serbia is a member of her family, and she cannot see Serbia maltreated. Austria knew that. Germany knew that, and Germany turned round to Russia and said, "Here, I insist that you shall stand by with your arms folded whilst Austria is strangling to death your little brother." What answer did the Russian Slav give? He gave the only answer that becomes a man. He turned to Austria and said, "You lay hands on that little fellow and I will tear your ramshackle empire limb from limb." And he is doing it.

That is the story of the little nations. The world owes much to little nations—and to little men. This theory of bigness—you must have a big empire and a big nation, and a big man—well, long legs have their advantage in a retreat. Frederick the Great chose his warriors for their height, and that tradition has become a policy in Germany. Germany applies that ideal to nations; she will only allow six-feet-two nations to stand in the ranks. But all the world owes much to the little five feet high nations. The greatest art of the world was the work of little nations. The most enduring literature of the world came from little nations. The greatest literature of England came from her when she was a nation of the size of Belgium fighting a great Empire. The heroic deeds that thrill humanity through generations were the deeds of little nations fighting for their freedom. Ah, yes, and the salvation of mankind came through a little nation. God has chosen little nations as the vessels by which he carries the choicest wines to the lips of humanity, to rejoice their hearts, to exalt their vision, to stimulate and to strengthen their faith; and if we had stood by when two little nations were being crushed and broken by the brutal hands of barbarism our shame would have rung down the everlasting ages.

But Germany insists that this is an attack by a low civilisation upon a higher. Well, as a matter of fact, the attack was begun by the civilisation which calls itself the higher one. Now, I am no apologist for Russia. She has perpetrated deeds of which I have no doubt her best sons are ashamed. But what Empire has not? And Germany is the last Empire to point the finger of reproach at Russia? But Russia has made sacrifices for freedom—great sacrifices. You remember the cry of Bulgaria when she

was torn by the most insensate tyranny that Europe has ever seen. Who listened to the cry? The only answer of the higher civilisation was that the liberty of Bulgarian peasants was not worth the life of a single Pomeranian soldier. But the rude barbarians of the North—they sent their sons by the thousands to die for Bulgarian freedom.

What about England? You go to Greece, the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, and France, and all these lands, gentlemen, could point out to you places where the sons of Britain have died for the freedom of these countries. France has made sacrifices for the freedom of other lands than her own. Can you name a single country in the world for the freedom of which the modern Prussian has ever sacrificed a single life? The test of our faith, the highest standard of civilisation is the readiness to sacrifice for others.

I would not say a word about the German people to disparage them. They are a great people; they have great qualities of head, of hand, and of heart. I believe, in spite of recent events, there is as great a store of kindness in the German peasant as in any peasant in the world. But he has been drilled into a false idea of civilisation, efficiency, capability. It is a hard civilisation; it is a selfish civilisation; it is a material civilisation. They could not comprehend the action of Britain at the present moment. They say so. "France," they say, "we can understand. She is out for vengeance, she is out for territory—Alsace Lorraine. Russia, she is fighting for mastery, she wants Galicia." They can understand vengeance, they can understand you fighting for mastery, they can understand you fighting for greed of territory; they cannot understand a great Empire pledging its resources, pledging its might, pledging the lives of its children, pledging its very existence, to protect a little nation that seeks for its defence. God made man in his own image—high of purpose, in the region of the spirit. German civilisation would re-create him in the image of a Diesler machine—precise, accurate, powerful, with no room for the soul to operate. That is the "higher" civilisation.

What is their demand? Have you read the Kaiser's speeches? If you have not a copy, I advise you to buy it; they will soon be out of print, and you won't have any more of the same sort again. They are full of the clatter and bluster of German militarists—the mailed fist, the shining armour. Poor old mailed fist—its knuckles are getting a little bruised. Poor shining armour—the shine is being knocked out of it. But there is the same swagger and boastfulness running through the whole of the speeches. You saw that remarkable speech which appeared in the "British Weekly" this week. It is a very remarkable product, as an illustration of the spirit we have got to fight. It is his speech to his soldiers on the way to the front:—

Remember that the German people are the chosen of God. On me, on me as German Emperor, the Spirit of God has descended. I am His weapon, His sword and His vizard. Woe to the disobedient! Death to cowards and unbelievers!

There has been nothing like it since the days of Mahomet.

Lunacy is always distressing, but sometimes it is dangerous, and when you get it manifested in the head of the State, and it has become the policy of a great Empire, it is about time when that should be ruthlessly put away. I do not believe he meant all these speeches. It was simply the martial straddle which he had acquired; but there were men around him who meant every word of it. This was their religion. Treaties? They tangled the feet of Germany in her advance. Cut them with the sword. Little nations? They hinder the advance of Germany. Trample them in the mire under the German heel. The Russian Slav? He challenges the supremacy of Germany and Europe. Hurl your legions at him and massacre him. Britain? She is a constant menace to the predominancy of Germany in the world. Wrest the trident out of her hands. Ah! more than that. The new philosophy of Germany is to destroy Christianity. Sickly sentimentalism about sacrifice for others—poor pap for German digestion. We will have a new diet. We will force it on the world. It will be made in Germany. A diet of blood and iron. What remains? Treaties have gone; the honour of nations gone; liberty gone. What is left? Germany—Germany is left—Deutschland über Alles. That is all that is left.

That is what we are fighting, that claim to predominancy of a civilisation, a material one, a hard one, a civilisation which if once it rules and sways the world, liberty goes, democracy vanishes, and unless Britain comes to the rescue, and her sons, it will be a dark day for humanity. We are not fighting the German people. The German people are just as much under the heel of this Prussian military caste, and more so, thank God, than any other nation in Europe. It will be a day of rejoicing for the German peasant and artisan and trader when the military caste is broken. You know his pretensions. He gives himself the airs of a demi-god. Walking the pavements—civilians and their wives swept into the gutter; they have no right to stand in the way of the great Prussian junker. Men, women, nations—they have all got to go. He thinks all he has got to say is, "We are in a hurry." That is the answer he gave to Belgium. "Rapidity of action is Germany's greatest asset," which means "I am in a hurry. Clear out of my way."

You know the type of motorist, the terror of the roads, with a 60-horse power car. He thinks the roads are made for him, and anybody who impedes the action of his car by a single mile is knocked down. The Prussian junker is the road-hog of Europe.

Small nationalities in his way hurled to the roadside, bleeding and broken ; women and children crushed under the wheels of his cruel car. Britain ordered out of his road. All I can say is this : If the old British spirit is alive in British hearts, that bully will be torn from his seat. Were he to win it would be the greatest catastrophe that has befallen democracy since the days of the Holy Alliance and its ascendancy. They think we cannot beat them. It will not be easy. It will be a long job. It will be a terrible war. But in the end we shall march through terror to triumph. We shall need all our qualities, every quality that Britain and its people possess. Prudence in council, daring in action, tenacity in purpose, courage in defeat, moderation in victory, in all things faith, and we shall win.

It has pleased them to believe and to preach the belief that we are a decadent nation. They proclaim it to the world, through their professors, that we are an unheroic nation skulking behind our mahogany counters, whilst we are egging on more gallant races to their destruction. This is a description given to us in Germany—"a timorous, craven nation, trusting to its fleet." I think they are beginning to find their mistake out already. And there are half a million of young men of Britain who have already registered their vow to their King that they will cross the seas and hurl that insult against British courage against its perpetrators on the battlefields of France and of Germany. And we want half a million more. And we shall get them.*

But Wales must continue doing her duty. That was a great telegram that you, my Lord (the Chairman), read from Glamorgan. I should like to see a Welsh army in the field. I should like to see what the race who faced the Normans for hundreds of years in their struggle for freedom, the race that helped to win the battle of Crecy, the race that fought for a generation under Glendower, against the greatest captain in Europe—I should like to see that race give a good taste of its quality in this struggle in Europe ; and they are going to do it.

I envy you young people your youth. They have put up the age limit for the army, but I march, I am sorry to say, a good many years even beyond that. But still our turn will come. It is a great opportunity. It only comes once in many centuries to the children of men. For most generations sacrifice comes in drab weariness of spirit to men. It has come to-day to you ; it has come to-day to us all, in the form of the glow and thrill of a great movement for liberty, that impels millions throughout Europe to the same end. It is a great war for the emancipation of Europe from the thralldom of a military caste, which has cast its shadow upon two generations of men, and which has now plunged the world into a welter of bloodshed. Some have already

* "Glamorgan has raised 20,000 men."

given their lives. There are some who have given more than their own lives. They have given the lives of those who are dear to them. I honour their courage, and may God be their comfort and their strength.

But their reward is at hand. Those who have fallen have consecrated deaths. They have taken their part in the making of a new Europe, a new world. I can see signs of its coming in the glare of the battlefield. The people will gain more by this struggle in all lands than they comprehend at the present moment. It is true they will be rid of the menace to their freedom. But that is not all. There is something infinitely greater and more enduring which is emerging already out of this great conflict; a new patriotism, richer, nobler, more exalted than the old. I see a new recognition amongst all classes, high and low, shedding themselves of selfishness; a new recognition that the honour of a country does not depend merely on the maintenance of its glory in the stricken field, but in protecting its homes from distress as well. It is a new patriotism, it is bringing a new outlook for all classes. A great flood of luxury and of sloth which had submerged the land is receding, and a new Britain is appearing. We can see for the first time the fundamental things that matter in life and that have been obscured from our vision by the tropical growth of prosperity.

May I tell you, in a simple parable, what I think this war is doing for us? I know a valley in North Wales, between the mountains and the sea—a beautiful valley, snug, comfortable, sheltered by the mountains from all the bitter blasts. It was very enervating, and I remember how the boys were in the habit of climbing the hills above the village to have a glimpse of the great mountains in the distance and to be stimulated and freshened by the breezes which came from the hilltops, and by the great spectacle of that great valley.

We have been living in a sheltered valley for generations. We have been too comfortable, too indulgent, many, perhaps, too selfish. And the stern hand of fate has scourged us to an elevation where we can see the great everlasting things that matter for a nation; the great peaks of honour we had forgotten—duty and patriotism, clad in glittering white; the great pinnacle of sacrifice pointing like a rugged finger to Heaven. We shall descend into the valleys again, but as long as the men and women of this generation last they will carry in their hearts the image of these great mountain peaks, whose foundations are unshaken though Europe rock and sway in the convulsions of a great war.

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A CALL TO ARMS

THE PRIME MINISTER

THE WAR OF CIVILIZATION

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HONOUR AND DISHONOUR

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